

ANECDOTES OF FAMOUS PEOPLE BY JANET ROSS

An English Woman's Reminiscences of Authors, Statesmen and Artists Met During Her Girlhood and Later

By JEANNETTE L. GILDER.

ANOTHER volume of reminiscences by Janet Ross, "The Fourth Generation," will soon be issued by the Messrs. Scribner. Some years ago Mrs. Ross published "Three Generations of English Women," which made an enormous success, and this has been followed by the present volume.

While there has been nothing sensational in the life of this interesting woman, who was born in 1842, she met, during her childhood and later, most of the famous people who flourished in England from the 80s to the present day. Her father was Sir Alexander Cornwall Duff Gordon, who was born in 1811, and her mother was a Miss Austin, who came not only of a good family, but one that cultivated the friendship of poets, painters, statesmen and the like.

A remarkable circle of literary and artistic friends found welcome at the house in Queen's Square, where they lived when Janet Duff Gordon was a child. Among these were Richard, familiarly known as Dickie Doyle, the famous cartoonist of Punch. Janet was the only child. She writes:

"I was a spoiled and rather lonely child. Nearly all my friends were old people—old at least to me, contemporaries of my grandparents and of my father and mother. Richard Doyle I especially loved because he drew for me the heroes and heroines of my fairy tales as I sat upon his knee. My nurse read aloud to me, and I can still remember the terrible blank in my young life when Nanny married. Her successor scoffed at fairies and gnomes, so I painfully taught myself to read, much encouraged by Charles Dickens, who gave me what he called one of the most delightful of books, the 'Seven Champions of Christendom.'"

"My father, whom I adored, was away all day at his office, and my mother wrote a great deal. After her marriage she finished a translation of Niebuhr's 'Stories of the Gods and Heroes of Greece,' which was published in 1842 under the name of her mother, Mrs. Austin. The following year her translation of the 'Amber Witch,' still a classic, appeared, and soon afterward that of 'The French in Algiers' and 'Remarkable Criminal Trials.'"

The loneliness of her life was relieved by the appearance of Hassan el Bakkeet, commonly called "Hatty," a Nubian boy who came into the family when she was a small child, he having been turned out of the streets to shift for himself or die or anything else because he was apparently going blind. But the Duff Gordons had his eyes operated upon, and he did not go blind and stayed in the family for many years. There is a picture of the little Janet and Hatty made by the Hon. Mrs. Norton given in this book.

"One of my earliest recollections," writes Mrs. Ross, "is seeing my mother dress for a party at Charles Dickens's and thinking that, though she was rather too big, she looked like a beautiful fairy queen. At midnight I was awakened by violent rain and looking out the front door. A policeman had found my father looking out to the railway, and at first thought he was drunk, but soon saw he was too ill to get up the steps without help. My mother was acting in a charitable and my father, feeling unwell, had slipped away unseen."

"Our cousin and doctor, Edward Rigby, was sent for and pronounced it a bad case of cholera. Soon afterward my mother arrived, very unwell, and I will remember how strange she looked one morning in her red dressing gown, even paler than usual, her magnificent hair coiled round and round her head with a jewel stuck in here and there."

"The great event of my life was my birthday, when I was allowed to dine downstairs and to invite my particular friends. My fifth I will remember, for Thackeray played a trick on the 'young revolutionist,' as he afterward called me because I was born on February 21. My guests were Mrs. Norton, Lord Lansdowne, Tom Taylor, Bayley, Richard Doyle and Thackeray, who gave me a message, declaring that it was like cabinet pudding. But I turned the tables on him, for I liked it and insisted, as queen of the day, on having two more of his."

"I still possess a sketch he made for the frontispiece of 'Pendennis' while I was sitting on his knee. He often dropped into dinner, sometimes announcing himself in verse. The following is one of his epistles:

"A nice leg of mutton, my Lucie,
I pray thee have ready for me;
Have it smoking and tender and juicy,
For no better meat can there be."

Her sixth birthday, in the eventful year of 1848, was not celebrated by the usual dinner, to her great chagrin. Her grandmother, who had fled from Paris and was with her family, the Duff Gordons, in London, was much alarmed about her French friends, particularly about the Duff Gordons.

"Every hour brought worse news. Instead of a dinner with dear Tom Taylor as toastmaster, an office he had filled for many consecutive years to every one's amusement and delight, my birthday was celebrated by barricades, bloodshed, the falling of a throne and the flight of a king. On the afternoon of March 1 Lord Lansdowne sent to say that M. Gambetta was reported to have landed in Jersey with the Duchess of Orleans and her two boys. On his arrival in London with his daughters they came to our house, and he often told me afterward that a lesson of rest it seemed."

"Well, I remember how disappointed I was when a small, neatly dressed gentleman came into the room, looking very much like anybody else, with rather cold, staidish manners. I had heard so much about the Prime Minister of France from my grandmother, who had a cult for him, that I expected to see a magnificent man covered with gold embroidery and all spangled with blood. I told my father that it had not been at all worth while to turn on my best frock as there was nothing extraordinary about M. Gambetta. Long afterward a friend who saw M. Gambetta during the revolution told me that among the most impressive things I had ever seen or heard was M. Gambetta draped in the tricolor flag, descending the Marseillaise at the Theatre Lyrique. She looked, he said, like the Goddess of Revolution."

"Mrs. Ross can remember going with her parents to Samuel Rogers's famous Sunday morning breakfasts:

"My parents often went to Mr. Rogers's Sunday morning breakfasts in St. James's place, and he insisted that his 'baby love,' as he called me, should come later for dessert. A great treat it was, for the old poet kept a bunch of grapes for me, which I ate perched on a chair and two cushions by his side. Would that I could recollect the talk that charmed me, young as I was, so much, that the highest praise I could think of for a grand Twelfth Night party at Baroness de Reinschild's was, 'It is almost as nice as Mr. Rogers's breakfasts.'"

"Long afterward my mother told me that one morning the conversation turned on fame, and Rogers related how he was once dining at Pope's villa at Richmond with Byron and Moore, when the same subject was discussed. Singing was heard in the distance, and presently a host full of people floated past. They were singing 'Love's Young Dream.' Byron put his hand on Moore's shoulder, saying: 'There, that is fame.'"

"The poet told me to be sure and always get up early, like a good little child, and see the sun rise, and to look at the sunset before going to bed, and then perhaps some day I might write poetry. 'Prose you will certainly write well,' he added; 'it's in your blood,' an expression I did not understand."

Mrs. Norton was an intimate friend of Lady Duff Gordon and was constantly at her house. Her musical voice made a great impression upon the little Janet, as did that of Alfred Tennyson, which was rather gruff and monotonous. "He sometimes read his poems aloud in Queen Square, and told my mother he had her in his mind when he wrote 'The Princess.' I don't think she was as much flattered as many of his admirers would have been."

"Once at dinner, when Tom Taylor and Kinglake were there, who both afterward told me the story with amusement, Tennyson burst forth: 'I never loved a fear gazelle, but some damned brute, that's you, Gordon, had married her first.'"

It was in 1851 that Janet first went to the theatre. "Lord Lansdowne had sent my mother a box for the last appearance of Macready as Cardinal Wolsey and begged that Janet might be taken to see the great actor. The impression he made upon me was so strong that I can still call up before me the tall, rather gaunt

figure in flowing red robes, and hear the fine voice declaiming the famous lines: 'Farewell, a long farewell to all my greatness.'"

"Of the other personages in the play I remember absolutely nothing."

One of the many visitors to Queen's Square whom the little Janet cordially disliked was Mr. Carlyle. Mrs. Ross says of him:

"He was a great friend of Mrs. Austin's, and professed to admire Lucykin, as he called my mother, very much. One afternoon he had a discussion with her on German literature, and her wonderful eloquence and fire prevailing, Carlyle lost his temper and burst forth in his Scotch tongue: 'You're just a windbag, Lucie; you're just a windbag.'"

"I had been listening with all my ears as my grandmother always spoke with such enthusiasm about him; but furious at my mother being, as I thought, 'called names' by so uncouth a man, I interrupted and exclaimed: 'My papa says men should be civil to women.' For which pert remark I was reproved by my mother."

"Mr. Carlyle, however, was not offended and only observed: 'Lucykin, that child of yours has an eye for an inference.' I did not see him again for some years, as in 1851 my father took a house at Esher and we left London for good. My delight was great as I was given a pony which I named Eothen, after our dear friend Kinglake."

A nephew of Sir Alexander Duff Gordon, Sir George Cornwall Lewis, succeeded Mr. Gladstone as Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1854, and Sir Alexander was made his private secretary. Mrs. Ross writes:

"Great was the rejoicing at the 'Gordon Arms,' for it was a pleasant change for my father, who as one of the senior clerks of the Treasury always with his usual good nature had done every one's work. In the summer Sir Charles Trevelyan took Lady Byron's house at Esher, which was nearly opposite ours. Lord Macvilly had taken an ugly little cottage on Ditch Marsh, and often walked over to see his sister. He generally came in to see my mother, and I must have tried his patience severely, for as soon as I heard his voice I installed myself by his knee and imperiously said: 'Now talk.' I rather suspect my mother might occasionally have liked to give a counter order, for she also talked much and well; but Macvilly was impossible to stop when once launched."

A curious incident apropos of Kinglake's book "Eothen" was told to Mrs. Ross by

Lord Houghton, who was in Paris in 1848. "Mr. Monckton Milnes he was then," Mr. Monckton Milnes, as he then was, never missed an opportunity of seeing everybody and everything, and by great perseverance obtained an audience of M. de Lamartine. He found the poet Minister writing decrees and tearing up those of his colleagues, until paper was accumulated nearly up to his waist. Lamartine, who hardly gave himself time to eat or to sleep, vouchsafed scant words to the intrusive Englishman, who had waited a long time for his audience. While waiting Milnes looked at the books on the table, and noticed one lying open, face downward. Always curious, he turned it over, and found it was "Eothen," open at the description of Kinglake's

visit to Lady Hester Stanhope, during which she mentioned Lamartine."

Here is an amusing anecdote of Lord Lansdowne, who always wore what was called the Whig dress, a dark blue coat with brass buttons and a buff colored waistcoat:

"Being perhaps aware of his grand air, he used to tell a story about Turner's old maid with great zest. Having rung the bell at Turner's house in Queen Anne street several times without getting an answer he was just going away when the woman appeared in the area, looked up, and said: 'Be you the cat's meat man?'"

Here is a pretty anecdote of George Meredith, who was intimate in the Duff Gordon household. One day little Janet was out riding on her pony when a little boy fell on the road in front of her, but fortunately, was not hurt. He was badly frightened and began to cry, but soon stopped, saying: "Papa says little men ought not to cry." She asked him where his father lived and he pointed to a cottage where lodgings were to be had.

Mrs. Ross accompanied her husband to Egypt, where he held an official position. She was on excellent terms with the rulers of that land and with all the foreigners who came there during Mr. Ross's term of office. While there she had her photograph taken in Turkish costume by Robert Browning.

In a letter to her husband she tells of a conversation she had with dear old St. Hilare, with whom she dined the night before. He talked about M. Thiers, whose power of work he said was prodigious. Mrs. Ross writes:

"He and St. Hilare were always up and at work every morning at 5, and often the latter worked all night. Thiers used to undress and go to bed for an hour and a half before dinner, and he had that enviable faculty of sleeping when he wished."

"I was called one day during a council to give some explanations," said our old friend, "and sat at the right hand of M. Thiers. I had been working for two whole nights and fell fast asleep during the discussion. M. Thiers woke me and explained to the Ministers. 'Messieurs, pardonnez a ce pauvre St. Hilare; je ne ferai pas le quart du travail si je n'avais point cet ami si devoue.' That repaid me," added St. Hilare, with a proud smile.

"He went on to mention other public men. Freycinet he described as having been first a Bonapartist, then a Republican, then a Gambettist, and now again a Republican. An admirable orator, cleverish and unscrupulous, he it is who ruined the French finances with his railway schemes, which cost the nation

Dickens and Thackeray Petted Her—Poem Meredith Wrote for Her—How Gladstone Was Butted by Cow

hand and the little boy with the other, and rang. A gentleman came out, kissed the child and then looked hard at me. 'Are you not Lady Duff Gordon's daughter?' he asked; and before the answer was out of my mouth he clasped me in his arms, exclaiming: 'Oh, my Janet! Don't you know me? I'm your Post.'"

Meredith had left Weybridge before we moved from London to Esher, and though all his friends, particularly Tom Taylor, had tried to find out where he and his baby boy were, he seemed to have vanished into space. He did not know we were at Esher, and at once declared he would come and live near us. I was obliged to ride off to the station to meet my father, but on our way home we stopped and told him to come to dinner. Great was the joy at having found our friend again."

Meredith was fond of music, and his favorite song was Schubert's "Addio." His young friend complained about the commonplace German words, so he wrote for her the following verses:

SCHUBERT'S ADDIO.
The pines are darkly swaying;
The skies are ashen gray;
I mock my soul delaying
The word I have to say.
As if above it thundered
That we, who are one heart,
Must now for aye be sundered
My passion bids me part.
I dare not basely languish
Nor press your lips to mine;
But with one cry of anguish
My darling I resign.

Our dreams we two must smother;
The bitter truth is here.
This hand is for another
Which I have held so dear.

To pray that at the altar
You may be blessed above;
Ah, help me, if I falter,
And keep me true to love.

But once, but once, look kindly,
Once clasp me with your spell;
Let joy and pain meet blindly,
And throb our dumb farewell.

G. M.

In a letter to Mrs. Ross after her marriage Meredith said:

"I have three works on hand. The most advanced is 'Emilia Belloni,' of which I have read some chapters to your mother, and gained her strong approval."

After his return to America Mr. Clemens wrote to Mrs. Ross as follows:

"I asked Secretary Morton to send some watermelon seeds, and told him I had a key to your garden and that you kept no dog I was afraid of. Here is his answer."

In this letter he enclosed a copy of the letter that he wrote to J. Stirling Morton: "DEAR SIR: Your petitioner, Mark Twain, a poor farmer of Connecticut—indeed the poorest one there, in the opinion of every one—desires a few choice breeds of seed corn and in return will zealously support the Administration in all ways honorable and otherwise. To speak by the card, I want these things to carry to Italy to an English lady. She is a neighbor of mine outside Florence and has a great garden, and thinks she could raise corn for her table if she had the right ammunition. I myself feel a warm interest in this enterprise, both on patriotic grounds and because I have a key to that garden, which I got made from a wax impression. It is not very good soil, still I think she could raise enough for one table, and I am in a position to select that table. If you are willing to aid and abet a countryman (and I think you are), please find the signature and address of your petitioner below. Respectfully yours."

Of the Clemens family Mrs. Ross says: "The Clemens family were very pleasant neighbors. He used to drop in at all hours, declaring that Poggio Gherardo was the nearest way to everywhere. I confess I preferred Mr. Clemens, keen sighted, sensible and large hearted, to the amusing, laughter provoking Mark Twain. Mrs. Clemens, one of the most charming and gentlest of women, was already in very old age, but her husband's devotion and almost womanly tenderness to her was very touching. One evening he persuaded him to sing some of the refrains to songs I had a revelation. Without much voice and with little or no knowledge of music (he played the bass notes hard with one finger) he sang in a most beautiful way. It was quite different from what one had generally heard sung as 'negro melodies.'"

Mrs. Ross knew Charles Dudley Warner in Florence when he was staying with Prof. Fiske at Villa Landor. She found him "not only a delightful talker and a highly intelligent man, but handsome, with winning manners and a sweet voice. His wife was charming and an admirable musician."

Here is an amusing anecdote of Gladstone related in a letter from Sir Arthur Gordon to Janet Ross:

"I walked in the procession at Lord Tennyson's funeral last week, and was thus able to see what appeared to me the most striking feature of the ceremony: the enormous crowd which filled every portion of the abbey and through which we passed on our long progress up the nave and through the choir and north transept to the grave. There was perhaps something slightly theatrical in some of the ceremonies; the black and white military funeral, and the business with which purple was substituted for the usual black. But with whatever drawbacks it was a most impressive occasion."

"Mine host, though he begins to show some signs of aging, is still certainly a G. O. M. physically as well as intellectually. Most old gentlemen of 88 would have been killed by the shock of being thrown down flat on his back by the butt of a cow. He only, as he expressed it, 'withdrew himself' from under the cow, and retired facing her to the shelter of an oak tree, where he sat down rather out of breath. But he said nothing about it till evening, when he complained that he was rather stiff, as a cow had knocked him down."

"Discussion rages all day as to the very poet laureate. Mr. G. raises a new Gladstonian distinction between the best English poet and the best poet laureate. I mean the best to fill that post office. As you know, Mr. G. goes every morning to early service at the parish church and loudly repeats the responses. It was rather striking to hear him roll forth these morning, the days of man are three score years and ten, and though man be so strong that he came to fourscore years, yet is his strength then but labor and sorrow, so soon passeth he away and we are gone."

It would be very easy to make twice as many quotations from this most delightful book as I have already made. It is filled from cover to cover with characteristic anecdotes and interesting letters. It is to be hoped that there will be another volume of Janet Ross's reminiscences in due course, but there is no hint of such a thing at present. Janet Duff Gordon, and later when she was Janet Ross, seems to have had her portrait painted or drawn by nearly all the famous artists of her day. As she was a handsome woman and exceedingly popular this is not to be wondered at.



Janet Ross by Lord Leighton.



George Meredith at 35



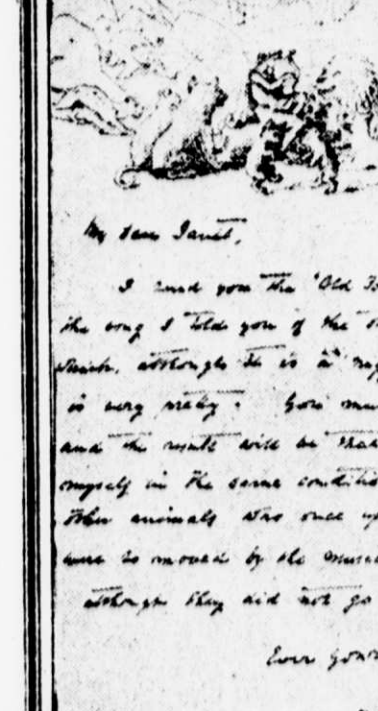
Janet Duff Gordon by G. Watts.



The Hon. Mrs. Norton by G. P. Watts.



Henry James by J. Kerr Lawson.



Letter from Richard Doyle to Janet Duff Gordon.



The Marquess of Clanricarde Driving His Cart To Ballinacloe Fair by Richard Doyle.

visit to Lady Hester Stanhope, during which she mentioned Lamartine."

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"Telling the groom to ride on," Mrs. Ross continues "I led my horse with one